

ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
PENNSYLVANIA

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
JOINT ECONOMIC

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 10, 2014

723

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
450 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

I am writing to follow up on my May 2014 letter regarding reforms to the E-rate program. I appreciate your response to the views expressed in that letter.

I understand that the Federal Communications Commission will vote on proposed changes to the E-rate system on July 11, 2014. While I applaud your efforts to ensure that the program enhance school technology capability, I would like to reiterate my strong concern regarding proposals to eliminate the funding of web hosting services for schools.

As I noted in my earlier letter, it is my understanding that a number of schools both in Pennsylvania and nationwide will face significant challenges in maintaining websites without the use of E-rate funding. These websites allow schools and school districts to communicate with students, parents and faculty, including regarding emergencies and provides accessible digital learning resources. This is particularly critical for rural or underserved schools which might not otherwise be able to provide access to such resources. Furthermore, I have been informed that schools utilizing E-rate funds for webhosting on average pay less for webhosting services than schools not using E-rate.

Finally, with respect to the availability of free webhosting services, school leaders have raised concerns related to the potential for data mining and other student privacy implications. It is critical that students are able to use digital learning tools and access information online without jeopardizing the privacy of minors.

I urge you to consider the importance of webhosting for school services and family engagement as well as the critical role of E-rate funding in providing such services to schools in the Commonwealth and across the Nation.

Thank you for your time and attention to my concerns.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

August 1, 2014

The Honorable Bob Casey
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

Thank you for your follow-up letter expressing concern about the E-Rate program cutting funds for web hosting. As you know, on July 11th the Commission adopted a new set of rules for the E-rate program.

I understand fully your concern and agree that web hosting services can be a valuable tool for school districts. The issue we face is how best to prioritize E-rate dollars so that all schools have the underlying broadband connectivity necessary for students and teachers to take advantage of the growing universe of available digital learning tools, as well as so libraries can serve their communities. Simply put, if broadband is the priority, then too many funds were being spent on non-broadband activities.

Schools need broadband connectivity to take advantage of digital learning technologies, and libraries need to provide their patrons with high-speed access to the Internet. I recognize the E-rate program has previously supported a variety of services, such as web hosting. However, I firmly believe that, in order to meet educational needs, the E-rate program must place a priority on ensuring that every school in America has a high-speed broadband connection and high-speed Wi-Fi in every classroom. Unfortunately, meeting that goal has meant redirecting funds previously spent on other activities such as web hosting.

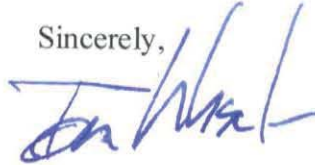
The *Order* adopted by the Commission at our July Open Meeting takes significant steps to address the Wi-Fi gap in America's schools today. Given that 40 percent of classrooms are not currently Wi-Fi-enabled, and nearly two-thirds of schools indicate that they do not have sufficient Wi-Fi capacity to meet their digital learning needs, it is critically important that we focus our limited program resources on connectivity, not just to the school or library, but to the student or library patron. The *Order* funds this support for Wi-Fi through the combination of funds already available for this purpose and by utilizing savings associated with transitioning support from non-broadband services to broadband.

As I have said before, E-rate modernization is one of the most important issues in front of the Commission today. We have an opportunity to make a real, positive difference in the lives of millions of students. I look forward to working with you and your colleagues toward our mutual goal of increased access to high-speed broadband in our nation's schools.

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Thank you again for your interest in this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Tom Wheeler